True Story Series

My Life's Story

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KIYOSHI YABE

According to the Japanese custom, being the first child of my parents, I was born at my mother's native home, a dry-goods store in the town of Yamato. My family name, Yabe, translated into English is "the arrow family." My birthday, according to the western calendar, was July 4, 1884, and every American unconsciously celebrated my birthday. There was great joy in my home and among my relatives and on the seventh day, they gave me the name Kiyoshi, which means "the love of cheerfulness."

As my father, like other Japanese, lived with his parents, my family was a very large one. At the time of my younger brother's birth, I remember, there were more than a dozen people in the house—great-grandfather and great-grandmother, the grand-father and grandmother, the father and mother, the baby brother, a married couple—workers on the farm, a young woman nurse, an orphan boy whom my father adopted and myself. Besides these were two cats, one dog and three horses.

During my childhood days I was influenced greatly by the non-Christian religions, especially Buddhism. My grandparents were b o t h exceedingly pious Buddhists. My mother also was a devoted worshipper of Buddha.

I graduated from the common school at the head of the class. My grandparents were so pleased with this that they expressed their gratitude to "Tenjin", the god of learning, by sacrificing some white chickens. At the age of thirteen I left my home and went to Wakamatsu in order to study in the government high school.

One day, while I was taking a stroll near the high school, I saw on the street a peculiar-looking person who was singing in the midst of a great crowd. He was a tall man; his skin was white; his hair was light; and his nose was extraordinarily large. Though I could not catch his odd Japanese talk, I was able to understand that he was a follower of the Nazarene and that he was trying to teach his religion to the non-Christian people of Japan. With great curiosity I wanted to know about this strange man, and upon investigation, I was informed that he was an American missionary of the Seventh Day Adventist denomination and that his name was William D. Burden.

This event took place during my Junior year and I began to go to church from that very week. I entered the missionary's Bible class, thinking that I might learn something about his language, manners, and customs, as at that time I had an ambition to be a popular and successful man, and was always anxious to learn new things from the Westerners, whom I had loved very much. I continued, therefore, to attend the church for nearly a year. I read the New Testament more than once, although I was not able to understand the deep significance of the spiritual kingdom.

In my Senior year, a great change took place in my home. The veneer factory, which belonged to my father, was burned a few months preceding my graduation from high school and my father, exceedingly poor, was no longer able to support me in college, in which I had been expecting to study. Through this calamity, however, our Father showed me his great mercy, for without this misfortune I would likely never have become a Christian.

When I learned of the bankruptcy of my home, I was sick at heart and looked around for a friend from whom I could find consolation but I could find none. I prayed to my old Buddha, but he relieved me not. After hours of torture, I approached the window of my room and opened the screen door. I saw the beautiful sunset. The evening sun, leaving a crimson tinge, was sinking in the western sky. Clouds were picturesquely colored along the horizon. As I watched this evening scene of North Japan, I met with the Creator for the first time in my life.

"Oh, Maker of the heavens and earth," I cried, " why did you destroy my father's factory? He is an honest, good-hearted business man." "Why, God," I continued, "did you punish me? I am not a Christian but have tried to be a good boy. Why did you punish me? Why did you make it impossible for me to become an educated man and make some contribution for the uplifting of my dear Japan?"

I cried out to God of Israel, and he heard my heart cry. I had been thinking that I was alone in distress, but I found with me my Father. The still, small voice of heaven

comforted my heart with the words, "All things work together for good to those who love God." The Spirit of God taught me that it is better to "lay up treasures in heaven" than to lay them up on earth, that it is better to be a true man of God than to be a popular man of worldly success, and that it is more blessed to be the minister of Jesus than to be the ambassador of Mikado.

Before long I decided my life's vocation—to become a Christian minister. But when I asked my father at home, through a letter, if he would allow me to enter the Mission School in Tokyo, he was tremendously grieved. He at once came home to Wakamatsu and asked me if I had not lost my senses. Though I explained to him the best I could why we should obey our Universal Father, it was in vain. My father would not allow me to become a Christian. "If you will give up the religion of your ancestors," my father finally said, "and embrace Christ, from now on you are no longer my son."

My father left the hotel for home, but I still saw vividly his sad expression. I tried to forget him but failed. For a few minutes I passed through a had trial. I almost decided to go after my father and tell him that I had changed my mind. While I was somewhat hesitating about my important decision, the Holy Spirit whispered to my troubled soul, "If any man will come after me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his life also, he can not be my disciple." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house."

On the following morning, before dawn, I left my old boarding house only seventy "sen," thirty-five cents in American money in my pocket. After walking for nine days I arrived in Tokyo. I entered the Seventh Day Adventists' Bible School, and became a member of the church.

The greatest problem during these days was: How can I save my family? I wrote many letters to my parents in which I stated concisely why one should worship Jesus. But I learned, from one of the younger brothers at home, that my father would not read anything if it was addressed in my handwriting. My heart was almost crushed. Though I was deeply disappointed, I simply prayed the Father, who is Wisdom and Power. I asked one of my Christian friends to send my father a portion of the New Testament in his handwriting, as I thought that he might read even a few lines of "the Word of God." This was a successful plan; not knowing his handwriting, my father took the book and read a little portion of the Gospel of Matthew. He happened to read first the Sermon on the Mount. With intense zeal and much delight, my father read that sermon. A short time later he resigned his position and left "O terra" (the temple). Then without serious difficulties, my mother, grandmother —on my father's side,—and some younger brothers accepted Christ.

For one year and a half I studied in the Bible School, and according to the doctrine of the Seventh Day Adventist denomination, tried to keep the ten commandments which were given through Moses to the people of Israel.

I was afterwards shown by his Spirit it was my thoughtlessness which had caused me to embrace the narrow doctrines of the Seventh Day Adventists and that it is not the teaching of Savior Christ to expect heaven by keeping the laws and commandments. I made up my mind to come to the United States of America in order to know more about the different denominations of the Christian Church and to prepare myself to do greater and better service for Jesus and for Japan.

In the year 1906, the "Empress of Japan" carried me from the land of Nippon to America. I landed first at Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. While I was there, a certain wealthy man at Dayton, Ohio, asked the Japanese consulate for two domestic workers who would be granted time to study. I applied for one of the positions and came to Dayton.

While I was passing through almost unbearable hardship and homesickness, it was very fortunate for me to meet with Rev. Takejiro Ishiguro at Bonebrake Seminary—then Union Biblical Seminary. Through Mr. Ishiguro I was Privileged to know Rev. and Mrs. J. E. Knipp, Dr. S. S. Hough, and Mrs. Mary Albert—now Mrs. Hough, who were my deep sympathizers in my trials and discouragements.

In the fall of 1907 I entered Steele High School. I graduated at the high school in the spring of the following year, 1908.

I went to the University of Chicago and studied there one year. Although I enjoyed immensely my study at that great institution

of learning, I felt keenly the lack of spiritual uplift in the undergraduate life.

While I was at Dayton, I often had heard the name of Otterbein University and had known that Otterbein stands as a first-class Christian college in the country. During the summer of 1909, the voice of the Father whispered to me, "Come to Otterbein!" and so I left Chicago and went to Westerville, Ohio.

From the time I left Japan I had not been a member of any church. After careful consideration, therefore, on the second Sunday of October, 1909, I joined the Church of the United Brethren in Christ.

At the time of my graduation from Otterbein University in June, 1912, a call came from the Japanese Y. M. C. A. of Chicago asking for my services in the religious department of the institution. I studied at the Graduate Divinity School of the University of Chicago for two years including three summers taking the A. M. degree in the departments of Practical Sociology and Religious Education in 1913, and B. D. in Church History and New Testament in 1914.

Having finished both college and seminary courses, I applied to the Church of the United Brethren in Christ for ordination. On September 13, 1914, at the Southeast Ohio Conference, which had its annual session at Bremen, Ohio, I was ordained by Bishop G. Mathews.

Thinking of my religious experience, I have passed through four periods, namely: the pagan life, the skeptic life, the Old Testament life, and the New Testament life. Before fifteen, I was an idolator. During my

high school days, I had no God. During the Seventh Day Adventist life, though I was exceedingly earnest in seeking righteousness, I was bound by laws and knew little of the grace of the Savior God. The last six years of my experience, I have been enjoying the life full of gratitude, realizing the warm touch of the Master's embrace.

The rivers and mountains of my native Japan still set forth the glory of God, but the people are walking in the shadow of death. Including all branches of Protestant Christians and Roman Greek Catholics, there are in Japan at present less than one per cent. of the population who are Christians. Our Chief Shepherd, in order to bring back one lost sheep, would leave ninety and nine and go after one wandering one. As I think of the mission field of Japan, I see ninety-nine lost sheep out of every hundred. I see them on the hills and in the valleys, in the South and in the North, in the city and in the country. Life without Christ is no life. My heart goes after these wandering millions in my native Japan.

"Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required." God has given me much and I know he requires much of me. Surely I need strong health and sound intellect, which are the urgent need of the Christian minister everywhere. Yet, even above these, I feel absolute necessity of the consecrated heart. With burning passions for the souls of men, I wish to plunge into my ministry among my people. I wish to make my joy His joy, my plan His plan, and my work His work.